

ACADEMIC PROPOSAL  
REGARDING  
THE CHAIR IN HINDU STUDIES  
AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

COMPILED BY  
DEPT. OF RELIGION  
CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY  
OCTOBER 1987

The following proposal follows (as best as possible) the outline for "Chairs of Studies: Funding Criteria" issued by the Multiculturalism Sector's Chairs Program. (See letter from Manuel da Costa, Director, Community and Cultural Programs, Department of the Secretary of State, APPENDIX A.)

## INTRODUCTION

In February of 1984 Professor M.N.S. Swamy, Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Computer Science, Concordia University, sent a letter (APPENDIX B) to the, then, Rector of Concordia University, Dr. J.W. O'Brien, suggesting that a Chair in Hindu Studies be created in one of the Montreal universities. Further, Dean Swamy suggested that since Concordia University has a strong Department of Religion, he thought that it would be most appropriate to have the Chair in our institution. Dean Swamy, in making that proposal was acting as Chairman of a committee made up of members of the Indian community, resident in Montreal. Rector O'Brien, acting with the support of the Rector's Cabinet, accepted Dean Swamy's proposal, in principle, and formal arrangements were made at various levels in the university to establish the process and procedures for creating a Chair in Hindu Studies. (See APPENDIX C 1-6). A report of the current amount of monies that have been revised for the Chair in Hindu Studies is included in APPENDIX D. At the same time, it should be said that the Indian Community resident in Montreal, a community of approximately 12,000 people, not only remains enthusiastic about the creation of a Chair in Hindu Studies, but also continues to organize cultural events, the profits from

which are deposited in the Fund for the Hindu Studies Chair. These are in addition to individual contributions made by people of origins in India as well as others. The amount of monies raised to date is, indeed, a substantial amount of money. (See APPENDIX D) The documents that make-up APPENDIX C 1-6 fulfill, for the most part, the requirements for the "FIRST STAGE, paragraphs A through E" in the "Chairs of Studies: Funding Criteria".

The Department of Religion at Concordia University believes that there are many outstanding reasons for the choice of both the city of Montreal and Concordia University as the home for the proposed Chair. Montreal is a tremendously important and central cosmopolitan city in Canada. It has very well established ethnic communities that add a special richness to intellectual and cultural life. Concordia has historically served these various ethnic communities very well. It is also the premier English university to attempt to open itself to francophone students.

The Chair fits in very well with the role that Concordia has taken up for itself. This university not only satisfies the needs of the traditional full-time undergraduate and graduate students, but it is very successful in reaching out to non-traditional students. Through vigorous part-time university programs, independent programs, night courses, and institutional supports for mature students, the University provides a place for students (particularly adult students) of diverse backgrounds and vocations to come into contact with high level academic and cultural life.

As will be noted in the following documentation, the

Department of Religion and the University have a proven teaching and research record in the area of Indian Studies, that is, the religion, culture, and history of the peoples of India. Further, it is situated only a few blocks from McGill University, which offers language training courses to supplement both undergraduate and graduate studies in religion at Concordia. Finally, the fact that Concordia already controls a good-sized fund dedicated to establishing a chair in Hindu Studies, argues extremely well for its choice as the home of that chair.

We now turn to comment upon the "FIRST STAGE PARAGRAPH F" as set forth in "Chairs of Studies".

#### F.1. THE DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

The Department of Religion at Concordia University was among the first of its kind in Canada. Not 'reconstituted' from antecedent, theologically-oriented academies, it began in the post World War II period developing methodological and theoretical perspectives of the "History of Religions" and "Comparative Religions" Schools as its basis. These perspectives informed the development of the Department in two significant ways. (1) Christianity was not viewed as providing the principal data for the study of religion, or for the creation of methodological and theoretical paradigms for the study of religion. (2) The methods and theories of a number of disciplines, separately and in combination, were viewed as shedding light upon the data of religions; history, literary studies, philosophy, sociology and anthropology were all seen as relevant to the task of elucidating religious phenomena. In its

earliest phases, then, the Department offered courses in the study of Hinduism, Buddhism, Chinese Religions, Judaism and Christianity and Islam. The faculty were expected to have a primary expertise in one of the major religious traditions of the world, a secondary expertise in another, and 'control' of several of the disciplinary approaches germane to the "Comparative Study of Religion." One characteristic that has continued to distinguish the Department of Religion from other departments of religion or theological studies is that its members often teach courses in other departments or in other programs, such as: Fine Arts, Political Science, Sociology/Anthropology, Canadian Studies, Asian Studies and the Ph.D. in Humanities. Furthermore, members of the Department of Religion have played active roles in creating and in teaching in the undergraduate colleges of Liberal Arts, Women's Studies, and Lonergan. Its Ph.D. program in Comparative Ethics was the first such program in Canada, and today, our Ph.D. program in Comparative Ethics is ranked as one of the best programs of study in North America.

The Academic Model: from Judaic Studies and the Jewish Community to Hindu Studies and the Hindu Community

Judaic Studies is a relatively recent arrival on the university-level scene, not only in Canada, but also in the United States. While scholars with an expertise in Judaism have long taught in North American universities. They were generally trained in Jewish theological seminaries, first as Rabbis, subsequently in doctoral programmes in those seminaries (more

rarely in departments of History or of Near Eastern Languages and Literature). Judaic Studies programmes were virtually non-existent in universities before the 1960's. And when they appeared, very rarely were they in the context of Departments of Religion. Hence, Judaic Studies generally had not benefited from the methodological and theoretical developments that characterized the field of Comparative Religion. That is still the case in most instances, as is evident from the profiles of members of the Association of Jewish Studies and from the character of the research presented at the Association, which is decidedly philological-historical in nature.

More than twenty years ago the Department of Religion sought and was given by Sir George Williams University the mandate to develop Judaic Studies within the academic context of Comparative Religion and to seek faculty to teach and research the data of Judaism in such a methodological and theoretical cadre. Now, twenty years later, we find ourselves 'old hands' at what is only now emerging in a significant number of instances across the continent, namely, the offering of structured, specialized programmes in the study of Judaism, from the multi-disciplinary perspective of the academic study of religion. We propose to do for Hindu Studies what we have done for Judaic Studies - first at the undergraduate level, later at the M.A. and Ph.D. levels. (See outline of Programs in Hindu Studies, below F.2). The Senior Scholar whom we shall seek for the Chair in Hindu Studies, however, will be one who is trained in Comparative Religion and who, like the other faculty of our Department, will be able to

teach courses that appeal to students from other departments and from other disciplines. And, indeed, these students will be of varied ethnic background - as is the case in our Judaic Studies courses.

#### F.2. COURSES AND PROGRAMS OF STUDY

At present, a student, at the undergraduate level, may take an Honours in Religion (60 credits), with a concentration in Asian Studies. In order to adapt our curriculum to fulfill the requirements of the Chair in Hindu Studies, and in order to meet the demands of students (of Indian and non-Indian ethnic backgrounds) who wish to take an Honours in Hindu Studies, our Department is proposing the following new Honours Program and new Majors Program in Hindu Studies. To our best knowledge this new proposal represents the only Hindu Studies Honours and Majors programs offered at the undergraduate level in Canada, and perhaps in North America:

##### A. UNDERGRADUATE HONOURS IN HINDU STUDIES (60 credits)

6 Reli 211<sup>6</sup> Understanding Religion

6 Reli 213<sup>6</sup> Major Religious Traditions of the World

6 Reli 311<sup>6</sup> The Religions of India, Ceylon and Southeast Asia

##### 6 chosen from:

Reli 313<sup>6</sup> Islam

Reli 318<sup>3</sup> Religion and Art in India, China and Japan

Reli 319<sup>3</sup> Modern Islam  
Reli 373<sup>3</sup> Comparative Mysticism  
Reli 380<sup>6</sup> Comparative Ethics: West and East

24 chosen from: (ALL NEW COURSES)

Reli 381<sup>3</sup> Hindu Tradition in the Early Vedic Period  
Reli 382<sup>3</sup> Hindu Tradition in the Late Vedic Period:  
The Upanisads  
Reli 383<sup>3</sup> The Epics of Hindu Tradition: The  
Mahabharata and the Ramayana  
Reli 384<sup>3</sup> Hindu Religious Laws and Hindu Society in  
the Medieval Period  
Reli 385<sup>3</sup> The Bhagavad Gita and the Bhakti Movement  
Reli 386<sup>6</sup> Classical Hindu Philosophical Schools  
Reli 387<sup>6</sup> The Vedantic Tradition and Modern  
Philosophical Thought  
Reli 388<sup>6</sup> Hindu Thought and Institutions in the  
Modern Period (Topical course to  
vary from year to year)  
Reli 389<sup>6</sup> Hindu Culture and its Impact Upon  
Europe and North America  
Reli 390<sup>6</sup> Hindu Culture and Hindu Communities in  
Canada: Problems of Identity

6 chosen from:

Reli 222<sup>6</sup> History of Judaism  
Reli 314<sup>3</sup> The Buddhist Tradition  
Reli 361<sup>6</sup> Studies in the History of Christian  
Thought  
Reli 363<sup>6</sup> Religion in Canada

Reli 376<sup>3</sup> Religion, Myth and Magic in Classical Antiquity

Reli 377<sup>3</sup> Religion and Occult Ideas in Modern History

Reli 379<sup>3</sup> Religion and Contemporary Psychic Experience

6 chosen from either A or B:

A. Reli 393<sup>3</sup> Special Topics in Religion and Culture

Reli 398<sup>3</sup> Selected Topics in Religion

Reli 399<sup>3</sup> Selected Topics in Religion

Reli 493<sup>3</sup> Religious Institutions

Reli 495<sup>3</sup> Religious Thinkers

Reli 498<sup>3</sup> Advanced Topics in Religion

Reli 499<sup>3</sup> Advanced Topics in Religion

B. NEW COURSE - Reli 411<sup>6</sup> Honours Seminar in Hindu Studies

Major in Hindu Studies (42 credits)

6 chosen from:

Reli 211<sup>6</sup> Understanding Religion

Reli 213<sup>6</sup> Major Religious Traditions of the World

Required of all Hindu Studies Majors:

Reli 311<sup>6</sup> The Religions of India, Ceylon & Southeast Asia

6 chosen from:

Reli 222<sup>6</sup> History of Judaism

Reli 313<sup>6</sup> Islam

Reli 314<sup>3</sup> The Buddhist Tradition

Reli 315<sup>3</sup> Mahayana Buddhism

Reli 319<sup>3</sup> Modern Islam

Reli 361<sup>6</sup> Studies in the History of Christian Thought

Reli 362<sup>6</sup> Questions from the Christian Tradition

24 chosen from: (ALL NEW COURSES- SEE ABOVE)

Reli 381<sup>6</sup>

Reli 393<sup>6</sup>

According to the interest of the students, other courses will be developed.

At the Graduate level, our M.A. in History and Philosophy of Religion and our Ph.D. in Comparative Ethics already have the feasibility of curriculum and program to allow students to take most of their course work, their guided research papers and theses in Hindu Studies. What follows, therefore, is a regrouping of existing courses in order to meet the requirements of Hindu Studies Programs at the M.A. and at Ph.D. levels. (For further information, see "the Graduate Studies Calendar," Concordia University, (1987-88).

A. M.A. in the History and Philosophy of RELIGION with Specialization in Hindu Studies (45 credits)

1. Core Courses required of all M.A. Program students:

a. Religion 609: Theories of Religion (3 credits)

b. Religion 610: Methodological Problems in the Study of Religion (3 credits)

2. Eight Selected Courses (without thesis) CR

Four Selected Courses (with thesis), taken from the following (24 credits OF 12 credits)

Religion 614: History of Hindu Thought and Institutions

Religion 615: Modern Hindu Thought and Institutions

Religion 619: Reading Course in World Religions (\*Hindu Studies)

Religion 621: Selected Readings in Contemporary Religious Thought (HS)

Religion 623: Selected Readings in Contemporary Religious Thought (HS)

Religion 626: Religious Language (HS)

Religion 627: Mysticism (HS)

Religion 628: Faith and Reason in Religion (HS)

Religion 629: Reading Course in Religious and Philosophical Thought (HS)

Religion 630: Theoretical Problems in Religion and Culture (HS)

Religion 632: Comparative Ethics I (HS)

Religion 633: Comparative Ethics II (HS)

Religion 639: Reading Course in Religion and Society (HS)

3. Without a Thesis, in addition to eight courses selected from 2., a student must take:

Religion 603: Guided Research Paper (3 credits)

4. With a Thesis, in addition to four courses selected from 2., a student must write a M.A. Thesis:

Religion 600: Master's Thesis (15 credits)

5. All students must write Comprehensive Examinations in the field of their specialization:

Religion 601: Comprehensive Examination (12 credits)

B. Ph.D. IN COMPARATIVE ETHICS

The Ph.D. Program in Comparative Ethics is flexible in its structure, allowing anyone interested in gaining a Ph.D. in Hindu Studies, opportunity to do so, providing that he/she meets the admission requirements. At the present (1987-88), three Ph.D. candidates are working in the area of Hindu Studies. For all students, the Ph.D. program is comprised of four basic requirements; totally 90 credits, and requiring three years of full-time study:

1. Course Requirements. The Ph.D. candidate is required to register for a minimum of three - 6 credit courses of directed reading under the supervision of a faculty advisor. (Total 18 credits)
2. The Ph.D. candidate must register for two doctoral seminars (6 credits each), in which all Ph.D. candidates participate, regardless of their fields of specialization. The seminars, taken the first and second years, will deal with general and methodological issues in Comparative Ethics. (Total 12 credits)
3. In the second year of study the Ph.D. candidate will register for and complete Religion 360: Doctoral

Comprehensive Examinations (15 credits), which will be in three parts: 1) dealing with methodological issues; 2) and 3) related to areas of specialization.

4. At this point, the Ph.D. candidate will prepare a doctoral thesis, which is understood as an original contribution to scholarship in the field. A total of 45 credits is given for the thesis (Religion 870: Doctoral Thesis).

All graduate courses and many undergraduate courses are taught in the evening in order that fully-employed adults might take advantage of continuing their education. This, of course, has been the unique tradition of Concordia University since its beginnings separately as Sir George Williams University and Loyola College. The Indian Community representatives on the Hindu Studies Committee have made it clear that any program in Hindu Studies must provide evening courses to serve adults who cannot, because of employment or family, attend day classes.

F.3. FACULTY TEACHING IN HINDU STUDIES OR WITH EXPERTISE IN INDIAN STUDIES

At present the Department of Religion possesses four fulltime scholars in South Asian religions, two of which study Hinduism as their primary speciality, Associate Professor David Miller and Assistant Professor Lynn Teskey-Denton. The third, Professor Sheila McDonough, whose primary area of expertise is Islam in the Indian sub-continent, has a secondary area of speciality in Hinduism. Associate Professor John Rossner, who

has expertise in comparative mysticism, like Professor McDonough has considerable knowledge of the Hindu data. Professors Miller and Teskey-Denton regularly teach courses, at the undergraduate and graduate levels, entirely or in part devoted to the study of Hinduism. Professor McDonough has taught courses, at the M.A. level, on the Life and Thought of M.K. Gandhi, and Professor Rossner has taught undergraduate courses in Comparative Mysticism and Parapsychology, which depend, to great extent, on Hindu Materials. Professors McDonough, Miller and Teskey-Denton have held Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute Fellowships for study in India, and Professor McDonough was a Director of the Shastri Indo-Canadian Institute in Delhi (1971). In addition, Prof. Sahni, of the Department of Economics was the Director in 1984-5 and Prof. Hill, of the Department of History is the Director at present, 1986-82.

Professor Miller has organized and directed the Shastri Summer Programs in Montreal (1974) and in India (1981). Professor McDonough and Miller were instrumental in creating the Asian Studies undergraduate Majors program. Professor McDonough and Miller also contributed chapters to Robert D. Baird, Religion in Modern India (1981), which serves as the basic text in many undergraduate and graduate courses on India. This reputation of excellence in the field of Hindu Studies and Indian Studies would be greatly enhanced by the appointment of another senior scholar in Hindu studies. Interaction with those of the McGill University, Faculty of Religious Studies, specializing in Indian Studies, would make Montreal one of the strongest areas for

Indian Studies in Canada, equal to Toronto and Vancouver. Finally, it should be noted that all four professors from our Department of Religion are active in local Indian Community groups, such as the India-Canada Association and the National Association of Canadians of Origins in India.

A final note must be made of the Canadian content involved in a Chair of Hindu Studies, seen, however, as a Chair of Hindu Studies and Comparative Religion. As this report has argued, it is not only the Indian Community resident in Montreal that would be served by a Chair in Hindu Studies, although that Community, through its Committee headed by Dean Swamy, has taken the initiative in providing funds for such a Chair. Just as our programs in Judaic Studies serve a population much greater than those of Jewish background, so also would a program of Hindu Studies -- both programs attempt to enlighten the general student population in their understanding of two rather large and highly viable ethnic communities who are seeking to maintain their identities in a pluralistic society that is undergoing rapid change and that is pressured by factors of modernity to become a uni-cultural society. In order for Canada to maintain its rich, multicultural base, it is necessary that Chairs in Hindu Studies, and in Judaic Studies, be created as one focus of cultural tradition and identity. Canadians of whatever ethnic background and of whatever religious belief will better understand each other and better live with each other, preserving the values of a multicultural society, by the establishment of chairs of ethnic studies. In particular, undergraduate courses such as Religion

America" and Religion 395 "Hindu Culture and Hindu Communities in Canada: Problems of Identity" will meet the needs of many Canadians, be they of Indian origin or not.

But, aside from academic courses given in the University, the person holding the Chair of Hindu Studies will be constantly available to enter into dialogue with other spokes-persons representing other ethnic communities and other religious beliefs. Concordia University is, by its very background and by its support to evening education, committed to the community of Montreal, to its people and to its needs. There is no doubt that many residents of Montreal -- indeed Canadians elsewhere -- will benefit greatly from the presence of Hindu Studies Scholar of Indian origin. The current thinking of our Department, in consultation with the Hindu Studies Chair Committee, is that the Chair of Hindu Studies be a rotating position, to which a Hindu scholar of international reputation is invited for a two-year term. Thus, after each two-year period the dialogue would be renewed or, perhaps, recreated, enriching the value of the Chair in Hindu Studies and its relationship to interested Canadians of whatever ethnic background.

The Department of Religion and Concordia University as a whole are looking forward to the opportunity of serving as the home of Canada's Chair in Hindu Studies. The University's research and teaching in the areas of Hindu and Indian studies testifies to its background and to its strength to vigorously promote the Chair. The University's commitment to providing an academic center for the various communities of Montreal as well

as for an excitingly diverse group of students, indicates that the Chair will have a profound academic and cultural impact. We firmly believe that the rich on-going dialogue between the countries of Canada and India will be dramatically furthered through this Chair of Hindu Studies.